

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Today, Representative Xavier Becerra (CA-31), Vice Chair of the House Democratic Caucus and Ranking Member of the Social Security Subcommittee, submitted the following statement into the Congressional record in honor of Cesar Chavez Day:

"Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the legacy of an American icon, Cesar Estrada Chavez, leader of the United Farm Workers, born on March 31, 1927. This Saturday, we celebrate the 85th anniversary of his birth.

"Cesar Chavez was born in Yuma, Arizona, to a life filled with early hardships, poverty and racial and social injustice. These experiences were his first lessons in what our nation should not be for millions of Americans.

"As a result of his family's losses during the Great Depression, Cesar Chavez's family, like so many others, migrated to California to work in the farm fields picking crops in hopes of economic stability. They eventually settled in San Jose where they lived in a barrio called Sal Si Puedes, "Get Out If You Can."

"Cesar Chavez often recalled the early injustices he experienced in school, and later as a farmworker. He vividly remembered throughout his life the prohibition of Spanish in school and being punished for speaking it...or even the signs in his community that said "Whites Only."

"His experience was universal for many in that era, whether they were Latino, African-American, Asian American or others facing discrimination. My own father encountered signs that read "No dogs and Mexicans Allowed" during this time.□

"It was on account of this type of blatant discrimination and racism that Cesar Chavez devoted his life to fighting for social and economic justice in our nation. Events around our nation remind us that the need for such a champion is still present today.

"In 1962, alongside Dolores Huerta, Cesar Chavez founded the National Farm Workers Association, later to become the United Farm Workers, an organization that came to be known as the driving force of the organized labor movement for farmworkers in the U.S."

"This movement, or "La Causa" as it was known in millions of homes including mine, taught us that solidarity, even in the face of brutal adversity can lead to victory. The "No Grapes" campaign and boycott led by Cesar Chavez and UFW was an omnipresent part of my youth and of many of my colleagues serving here today."

"We knew what it meant to not buy grapes and not eat them, to feel proud of being part of something bigger than ourselves, even if it meant going without something we loved, or answering curious questions from friends or classmates. And for me, when victory came, it was sweet - literally and figuratively - and my small sacrifice seemed like the most powerful thing in the world. " " "

"On the 85th anniversary of Cesar Chavez's birth, we are reminded that his personal story is one of transformation and legacy. He transformed his early experiences from Sal Si Puedes into "Si Se Puede", "Yes, we can." "

"Those words still ring true today, and serve as a mantra of hope for millions of Americans who seek fairness and equal treatment. Just ask the President of the United States. "

"Mr. Speaker, today we reflect on Cesar Chavez's lifetime of advocacy in the pursuit of social justice. Let us hope our legacy will be as enduring as that of our beloved leader and brother Cesar Chavez."